

The Role of Airpower in American Public Diplomacy in Africa

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14. ABSTRACT As one of the leaders in public diplomacy, Africa Command (AFRICOM) plays a delicate and developing role alongside the Department of State in implementing American goodwill on the continent. This paper will explore the role of airpower in public diplomacy in Africa by analyzing historical examples, presenting ideas for both military and civilian aviation in future endeavors, exploring AFRICOM's role in public diplomacy and overcoming roadblocks to success.				
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On the African continent, each of the fifty-three nations comes equipped with its own set of political agendas and challenges. In accordance with the current National Security Strategy, American diplomacy must go beyond securing natural resources and the war on terrorism, to pursuing initiatives that promote democracy and freedom for citizens of Africa without colonialist undertones. No single solution exists for furthering American diplomatic relations with each of these nations; instead, opportunities abound for creating individual political relationships. As one of the leaders in public diplomacy, Africa Command (AFRICOM) plays a delicate and developing role alongside the Department of State in implementing American goodwill on the continent. This paper will explore the role of airpower in public diplomacy in Africa by analyzing historical examples, presenting ideas for both military and civilian aviation in future endeavors, exploring AFRICOM's role in public diplomacy and overcoming roadblocks to success.

To understand public diplomacy, one must be aware of the items in the politicians' toolbox. To review, the four instruments of power (diplomacy, information, military and economic) are tools used by every government to meet national objectives. Using these tools, the government pushes or pulls an opposition force toward a preferred action. Hard power instruments are those measures that attempt to push someone to do your will, often by manipulating resources (i.e. physical or monetary) or with brute force (i.e. military "sticks"). Soft power relies on the resources provided thru culture, values and policies to get desired results through attraction rather than payment or coercion.¹ By shaping the preferences of others, soft power attracts the opposition to do what you want, rather than forcing them to do what they do not want to do.²

Effective use of soft power thru attraction requires an understanding of how others are hearing your message and how well you are listening to theirs.³ According to Dr. Nye, three items determine how likely the opposition will be attracted to a message. First, is the culture of the messenger attractive to the listener?⁴ Are there commonalities between a transmitter and receivers' language, religion, education, etc.? Second, does the government behave in accordance with its political values at home and abroad?⁵ With information available at a moment's notice, leaders must construct their message carefully the first time to prevent backpedaling. The administration must tailor its messages to be effective for both domestic and international audiences. Finally, are the government's foreign policies seen as legitimate and having moral authority?⁶ Historical examples influence opinions and are seen as predictors for the future. American soft power campaigns can benefit or suffer from the freedom of the press and society to criticize its government and their policies,⁷ a freedom that not all nations provide to their people.

The delicate balance of both hard and soft power makes for a smart power strategy.⁸ For example, typically wielded as a hard power instrument, the military has been able to exert soft power in Africa through military personnel exchanges, training exercises against a common threat like terrorism, and delivery of humanitarian relief. Ultimately, American soft power words are useless without actions that resonate throughout the population of African countries. Actions of public diplomacy are just one way to transform soft power messages into reality.⁹

Ryan Henry, Principal Deputy Undersecretary of Defense for Policy, defines public diplomacy, "as harmonizing our actions with our words to generate an alignment among key stakeholders – an alignment of their perceptions with our policy goals and objectives."¹⁰ Public diplomacy goes beyond propaganda and public relations to build long-term relationships that

create an environment where government policies can grow and flourish.¹¹ If a two or more countries' leaders have similar objectives, than public diplomacy campaigns are more likely to be successful.¹² How is it determined if a public diplomacy movement met its goals? Results from efforts might not be seen for decades or generations. Dr. Nye suggests that the number of minds changed through public diplomacy, as shown in interviews and polls, measure the success of a campaign.¹³

So, how does the role of airpower fit in the execution of American public diplomacy in Africa? Generally, the term “airpower” is associated with massive numbers of fighter or bomber aircraft and the destructive capabilities they provide the government to fight its wars. In this paper, “airpower” will refer to the benefits and contributions provided by both military and civil aviation to create and reaffirm mutually beneficial relationships with differing nations. Aircraft transport “stuff”, whether it is physical materials or intangible information. For African nations trying to find success outside their own backyard, aviation provides a common ground from which relationships can build. Areas like basic survival needs, security and economy are avenues where airpower can make a lasting contribution.

Civil affairs soldiers report that in Djibouti, the most pressing problem is lack of viable water sources. “What they fight over and kill over is water,” says Army Staff Sergeant McDonald.¹⁴ These civil affairs troops are building relationships at the well. Assisting with solutions to this problem is more beneficial than temporary solutions. One possible use for airpower to assist with this basic human need is through reconnaissance aircraft. Unmanned aerial vehicles in conjunction with satellite photography can give information on how water sources have changed or where soil erosion is most visible. Although an expensive far-reaching

option, aircraft can be used to seed clouds to produce rainfall in places like drought-stricken sub-Saharan Africa.

How can airpower increase the knowledge of land that has passed from generation to generation now threatened by significant climate changes? Recently the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) and the New Partnership for Africa's Development have “close[d] the gap between intentions and actions on behalf of smallholder farmers,” says Mr. Kofi Annan, chairman of AGRA and former secretary-general of the United Nations.¹⁵ Programs that aid in seed viability, soil health, agriculture policy and markets could benefit from airpower through the airdrop of seeds, fertilizer or water. Renewal of crop resources prevents soil erosion and provides a legitimate source of food and income. Again, reconnaissance aircraft can provide intelligence on fields, crop production, crop planning, or soil management. Private agriculture businesses in South Africa use aerial application to ensure their fields are productive through crop dusting and cloud seeding.¹⁶ Non-governmental agencies can employ the same methods to increase crop production.

To prevent the spread of malaria and other diseases, aerial application can also be used to spray for disease carrying insects. Aircraft transport food and medical supplies from urban areas to rural refugees via military or commercial means. To get access to places where damaged airfields or difficult terrain makes travel difficult, medical supplies and personnel can be airdropped. For example, in the indie film *Kandahar*, Red Cross aircraft airdrop artificial limbs to a remote medical station that treats landmine victims.¹⁷ Airdrops like these would be beneficial to amputee victims in countries like Sudan or Rwanda.

Where there is a lack of basic resources, there is most likely a lack of security. Airpower is a delivery vehicle for this security, but actions speak louder than words. United States Agency

for Internal Development (USAID) assistance in building and repair of runways gives peacekeeping forces greater access to the area. Creation of the Abyei Area Administration in Sudan has given legitimacy to the area by offering a recognized partner for international aviation organizations to work with.¹⁸ USAID rebuilt a battle-damaged runway in Sudan to ensure that access is available in the Southern Blue Nile Region.¹⁹

Naval security is a top priority for Central and West African nations. Africans are working with partners through the Africa Partnership Station (APS) to learn skills needed to counter smugglers and pirates, deter illegal fish poachers and interrupt human trafficking. According to America.gov, APS is “part of a broader effort to provide greater military and civilian professional opportunities so Africans are better able to handle local crisis independently.”²⁰ Drug smugglers and pirates are most likely using aircraft for their own reconnaissance. Here is an opportunity for naval aviation and coastal defense aircraft to continue spread public diplomacy thru education or intelligence sharing via reconnaissance aircraft.

Projects to improve the country’s economy by opening markets to African exports will prevent backsliding in basic needs and security areas. Transportation from rural to urban centers via roads or waterways is difficult because of challenges posed by security or limits placed by the terrain itself. Airpower is the answer. In Uganda, USAID worked with horticulturists to improve the supply chain for fresh cut rose and chrysanthemum flower markets. Upgrading storage and freight transportation at the Entebbe airport has prevented flowers from rotting on the tarmac.²¹ Training young men and women to fly and work in aviation is a favorable alternative to recruitment by extremist factions that are permeating African borders. American public diplomacy thru the use of non-governmental agencies encourages economic growth and

benefits the entire country. Improving security prevents national revenue from falling into corrupt hands.

To increase a state's role within its borders, United States Air Force Majors Peltier and Meer have researched building aviation capacity or air domain development (ADD) through cooperation between civil and military organizations.²² Stronger aviation systems help African nations increase their governing capacity and promote stability between urban and rural populations.²³ For example, the Democratic Republic of Congo has fewer than 1737 miles of paved roads and contains large areas of difficult terrain.²⁴ Through ADD, aviation resources can help the Congo boost economic activity, government presence and security.²⁵ By training pilots and air traffic controllers, and building and maintaining airfields, permanent jobs are created and air transportation is made safer for both local and international users.²⁶ Safer conditions will attract industry to the area, a benefit for both producers and suppliers. Military and civil aviation can work together to improve economic conditions by listening and responding to local needs.

The Department of Defense and the Department of State are working together on public diplomacy at AFRICOM, a geographic command committed to “conducting sustained security engagement...to promote a stable and secure environment in support of US foreign policy.”²⁷ The command addresses institution building to counter conflict, lack of stability, health issues, crime, climate change and other issues.²⁸ By participating in public diplomacy, is the military out of their swim lane? Opponents of AFRICOM argue that military endeavors in the field could “endanger the credibility of more traditional public diplomacy work.”²⁹ There are concerns that working alongside military personnel will compromise the neutrality of independent aid workers³⁰ but Mr. Henry rebuttals, “the Defense Department does not do public diplomacy. What we do is support public diplomacy. The public diplomacy lead is the State Department and

there's really nobody that I am aware of in the Defense Department who has any confusion about that.”³¹ AFRICOM is the link that will improve historically tense relationships between American military and civilian agencies, building a more unified government presence. Lessons learned from this relationship will benefit other geographic and functional commands as they incorporate public diplomacy.

For some African nations, with international nation-building assistance, this is the first time the military is subservient to a central civil authority.³² As AFRICOM works with these nations, leaders need to balance improvements in both areas. If a military becomes professional at a faster rate than other parts of the government, the potential exists for a coup.³³ In the same vein, both military and civilian authorities should ensure that new skill sets are used to improve the country, not work against the new government.

Africa has over fifty nations, hundreds of languages and ethnicities, and many millions of square miles, but reality hinders public diplomacy efforts. Money, time and personnel resources limit the number of improvement projects that are developed and completed. Aviation is an expensive form of public diplomacy. Therefore, actions with the most long-term benefits should be prioritized. Currently, resolution of two major wars receives the majority of the defense budget. The State Department is also limited by funding, in addition to labor and agility.³⁴ An increase in the Department of State’s budget is required to recruit and employ more personnel trained in cultural, public and aviation diplomacy. Information on successful and unsuccessful projects in other regions of the world needs to be researched and exchanged. Using our allies and their experiences to overcome these limitations is one option.

The benefits and measured outcomes of public diplomacy efforts will not be realized for decades, but that does not mean its role is not important to improving American foreign

diplomacy. Aviation in public diplomacy links rural and urban populations so that all may benefit in improvements to basic living necessities, security, economic markets and others matters. AFRICOM will work alongside non-governmental agencies and the Department of State to listen to the inhabitants of Africa. By listening, American public diplomacy can adapt to create long-lasting relationships that will benefit both parties by building local capacity, not creating substitutes for it. Airpower will have a role in this two-way communication.

¹ Nye, “Public Diplomacy and Soft Power,” 94.

² Ibid., 95.

³ Ibid., 103.

⁴ Ibid., 95.

⁵ Ibid., 95.

⁶ Ibid., 95.

⁷ Ibid., 106.

⁸ Ibid., 94.

⁹ Ibid., 94.

¹⁰ Seib, AFRICOM: The American Military and Public Diplomacy in Africa, 128.

¹¹ Nye, “Public Diplomacy and Soft Power,” 101.

¹² Ibid., 107.

¹³ Ibid., 101.

¹⁴ Hiel, “Military Tries ‘Soft’ Approach in Horn of Africa,” 1.

¹⁵ Babatunde, “Africa: Govts Partner Alliance for Green Revolution on Food Security,” 1.

¹⁶ Orsmond Aviation.

¹⁷ *Kandahar: Journey into the Heart of Afghanistan*.

¹⁸ USAID, “Success Story: Airstrip Improvements Help Open Path to Peace in Abyei,” 1.

¹⁹ Seib, AFRICOM: The American Military and Public Diplomacy in Africa, 1.

²⁰ America.gov, “International Coalition Focuses on Maritime and Security Needs,” 1.

²¹ USAID, “Success Story: Uganda’s Flower Industry Is Up and Running,” 1.

²² Peltier and Meer, “Air Domain Development in Africa: A Reasonable Proposition,” 111.

²³ Ibid., 111.

²⁴ Ibid., 111.

²⁵ Ibid., 112.

²⁶ Ibid., 113.

²⁷ United States Africa Command.

²⁸ Seib, *America’s New Approach to Africa: AFRICOM and Public Diplomacy*, 4.

²⁹ Ibid., 3.

³⁰ Dickinson, Elizabeth. “Think Again: Africom.” 2.

³¹ Seib, AFRICOM: The American Military and Public Diplomacy in Africa, 133.

³² Dickinson, Elizabeth. “Think Again: Africom.” 1.

³³ Ibid., 2.

³⁴ Ibid., 2.

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